

cism that ever came the way of our world-renowned tenor during his glorious career.

That Jussi knew how to present himself as a man of the world and that he had an instinct for what was apt was demonstrated during the time I accompanied him on tour. The scene was a packed Royal Albert Hall in London with people seated even of the stage. I whispered to Anna-Lisa that Jussi ought to sing something in English too. So far he had kept to German, French, Italian and Swedish. Anna-Lisa agreed and rushed backstage. By this time it was 11.30 p.m. and Jussi thought he had sung enough encores. Nevertheless he gave in, called for silence and, in the brilliant English he had first learnt in his childhood, said:

"Because you have been so nice to me this evening, I will now sing for you - Because!"

The hall erupted with thunderous applause and Jussi was able to make his way out, under a police escort, to a waiting taxi for his return to the Savoy.

The story of Jussi is not a closed book and stories about him will live for many a long day. That is how it is with the great personalities. In the end, though, trying to present through anecdotes fully evocative illustrations for "The Saga of Jussi" is an absurdity, for there is a great difference between writing stories and telling them. Ideally, one should hear the subject of these stories himself in the role of storyteller. The gaps which exist will probably never be able to be filled, but his beautiful voice will continue to resound in our memories and consciousness long after the printed word has faded. ■

<sup>1</sup>The Swedish language has two levels of address—a formal form and a familiar form, "du" being the familiar term for "you".

<sup>2</sup>A 200-year-old restaurant in Stockholm's Old Town.

## Concerts on Ljusterö

By Hugo Theorell



*Hugo Theorell, born in 1903, studied medicine at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, where in 1930 he obtained his M.D. degree. In 1932 he was appointed Associate Professor in Medical and Physiological Chemistry at Uppsala University, and in 1936 Head of the Biochemical Department of the Nobel Medical Institute. He dedicated his career to enzyme research, and received the Nobel Prize in Medicine in 1955 for discovering the oxidation enzyme and its effects. 1959-70 he was made Professor of Biochemistry at the Karolinska Institute. Theorell's discoveries provided basic knowledge for the eventual creation of artificial life in the laboratory, and are essential to the study of such diseases as cancer and tuberculosis. He received honorary degrees at universities in France, Belgium, Brazil and the United States and was a member of learned societies in at least ten countries, including the National Academy of Sciences in the US. He was a skilled amateur violinist and a Member of the Swedish Royal Academy of Music and Chairman of the Stockholm Symphony Society. He achieved all this in spite of the fact that his legs were paralyzed by polio in childhood.*

*His wife Margit was a concert pianist (who also accompanied him at Ljusterö). Hugo Theorell died in Stockholm in 1982.*

My acquaintance with Jussi Björling was so sporadic that it hardly entitles me to contribute to this memorial book. It was confined to a small sphere of activity - our mutual interest in giving concerts from time to time in order to lend a hand with the well-intentioned community work carried out by the population of that part of the Stockholm archipelago where we both spent so many delightful summers. But Jussi did not remain just an acquaintance to anyone—his unaffected, genial nature made him immediately a friend.

One day in July 1945, on rowing to the steamer jetty to collect the mail—you could not get petrol at that time—I happened to see a poster on the waiting-shelter's wall. It announced a benefit concert by Royal Court Singer Jussi Björling, with my wife and me as the other participants. Faintly terror-stricken at this prospect, I recalled that a mutual friend had proposed such an arrangement, but I had not thought that anything would come of it.

A few days later the moment had arrived—a warm evening, a hall crammed with a few hundred people, open windows that allowed many more outside to listen. Jussi sang as only he could when he was at his happiest. My wife and I played between times to give him a breather. Before he returned to sing for the second time he took off his jacket on account of the heat. I tentatively pointed out that he perhaps ought to take off his braces too, a suggestion which was immediately put into effect. Jussi, however, had lost a bit of weight and his trousers were showing a worrying tendency to slide down. A piece of string was found and with that we were able to pull together the two back trouser buttons. The situation was saved. Few probably noticed that Jussi went up and down from the podium sideways, and backwards out of the hall, determinedly keeping his back turned from the audience.

Afterwards we were invited to dine at the home of the arrangers of the concerts, the Larssons, a family of builders in Gärdsvik. What could be more natural than that Jussi and I should there devote some time to our national sport, arm-wrestling. The outcome in this instance was less of a foregone conclusion than had been our earlier musical competition, and the hilarious struggle favoured first one and then the other, with intense exertion on both sides.

Some time later that year one could read in the newspapers that Jussi had had to cancel engagements in America because of an attack of sciatica. When I subsequently met him he tried to lay the blame on me. "You caused this bit of mischief that evening on Ljusterö." I was able to object, rightly I think, that sciatica usually affects the leg and that we had been armwrestling, not playing tug-of-war. Later on there were some further concerts. No one should imagine that Jussi was any sort of prima donna who had to be persuaded to take part. Rather, there came to be established an amusing little ritual in which he would ring up and plead for us to help out again for a good cause, it was so enjoyable, etc.—as if persuasion were needed!

In August 1958 he had hardly had time to leave the platform after all the applause before he learned that the painting of the community centre was now assured, but that the kitchen needed doing up. Jussi's answer was characteristic: "We're sure to get enough for that after a bit more 'shouting' next time." The next time was the 17th August 1960, his penultimate official performance. It should actually have taken place six days earlier, but had had to be postponed because he was in hospital with heart trouble. But now he sang as never before. None of us who was there will ever forget the greatly loved, final encore, "Land, du välsignade" [Thou, blessed country]...

Proudly may one remember that he was Swedish, Sweden to your honour, Sweden.<sup>1</sup> ■

<sup>1</sup> An adaptation of the final lines of Ragnar Althén's "Land, du välsignade".

## Working for Jussi

By Bertil Hagman



*Bertil Hagman was born in 1919 and grew up in Stockholm. He studied at the universities of Stockholm and Uppsala, and was productive as a writer beginning in the early 1940s, especially in the fields of opera and ballet, for the Svenska Dagbladet newspaper and various periodicals. In 1957, he came to the Royal Opera in Stockholm as press officer and program editor and remained there until his retirement in 1985. In just a few months after Jussi Björling's death in September 1960, Hagman succeeded in editing the Minnesbok from which the essays here have been taken. He also edited the book by Birgit Nilsson that was published in English in 1981 as My Life in Pictures. Among his later books was Guldåldrar och guldroster (Golden ages and golden voices) in 2001, with a foreword by Birgit Nilsson. Bertil Hagman died in 2008.*

For the final vignette in this memorial book let us ask some of those at the Royal Opera, who over a number of years saw Jussi Björling develop from the poor but talented dalmas into the world famous tenor, what it was like to work with and for him. Their opinions are variations

on the one theme: a god-given voice, a musical genius, a conscientious and humble artist, and a whole-hearted friend.

We begin in the foyer at the box-office for it is there, of course, that the performance also begins. During a twenty year period the most faithful gathered there as Jussi's guest performances approached when one could be as sure as one can be about anything of being able to put up the "SOLD OUT" sign. Selling tickets for the 128 occasions on which Jussi appeared as a guest artist at the Royal Opera was both easy and difficult: easy in that the tickets were usually sold out within a couple of hours—it was just a matter of having everything organised before selling-time began and then counting the takings afterwards; difficult because people were so disappointed when there was a cancellation and money had to be returned. Naturally such things were trying, but as a rule the public accepted the situation with understanding and took their places in the queue again the next time. It could of course be that sales were a bit sluggish if Jussi had cancelled on one or more occasions just prior to a performance or if the newspapers had had to report that the public's idol had come down with a cold. This occurred, for example, a couple of years ago when Jussi was to sing des Grieux in *Manon Lescaut* for the first time in several years. The prospects looked alarming, for only a few days earlier he had been forced to discontinue a concert at the Malmö Municipal Theatre (right in the middle of an aria from *Manon Lescaut* moreover) because his voice had totally failed him following a severe and prolonged cold and a strenuous autumn schedule in the U.S.A. The newspapers had announced that he would sing on a certain day, but this guest appearance had had to be put off for a few days. The actual performance was, it is true, on a Saturday, but the date was 20th December, a time when audience attendance is normally poor. At any rate, people had been scared off by the notice of indisposition and when the performance